**Physician’s Lexicon**

The Harsh Vocabulary of Intemperance

“**AND NOAH BEGAN TO BE A HUSBANDMAN,**
and he planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine and was drunken.” Thus we learn from Genesis (9:20-21) the Scriptural origins, the antiquity of alcoholism; and we learn further that intemperance was an impediment to mankind even before mankind learned to be fruitful, to multiply and replenish the earth.

Alcoholism, as a human burden, is widespread; and the descriptive words of alcoholism are similarly abundant and varied.

The word, alcohol, descends from the Arabic *al-kohl* meaning the antimony and earlier from the Hebrew, *kahal*, meaning a fine powder such as antimony (used as an eye shadow and often called *kohl*; and by inference, something intense or spirited.)

An older medical term for alcoholism was *dipsomania*, derived from the Greek, *dipos*, meaning thirst (for any fluids), and *mania*, also Greek, for madness. *Dipsos*, a term often used in tropical medicine texts, defines thirst in general; and adipsia, the pathological absence of thirst. *Dipsosaurus dorsalis* (the Sonoran desert iguana), sometimes called the thirsty lizard, is a common creature to the hot Mojave desert lands.

*Oenomania*, a rarely employed diagnosis for chronic alcoholism, takes advantage of the Greek root for wine, *oeno-*, as employed in such terms as *oenology*, the study of wines; *oenanthic*, the odors of wine; *oenophile*, a lover of wine; and *Oenone*, in Greek mythology, the nymph-wife of Paris.

Temperance (and intemperance) are from the Latin, *temperans*, meaning to moderate, control, regulate, or diminish (as in the Scottish hymn, “Temper my spirits, Oh Lord”). The French infinitive, *tremper*, means to soak and sometimes dilute with water (and inferentially, therefore, lessen the action of the wine.).

An inebriant, a drunkard, is from the Latin, *inebriatus*, meaning an intoxicated human. The English word, *brio*, meaning vivacity, vigor, aliveness is also derived from the same root.

The street vocabulary for alcoholism is vast and multilingual, including such distasteful descriptives as barfly, souse, boozzer (from a Middle Dutch, *busen*, meaning to carouse), rummy, vodka (from the diminutive of an older Russian word, *voda*, meaning water) and whiskyhead (the word, whisky, derives from the Gaelic, *usquebaugh*, meaning, literally, the water of life.)

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